

Human Services Committee Testimony
February 25, 2013

My name is Kelly Phenix, I live in Bristol. I was appointed to the Behavioral Health Partnership Oversight Council (BHPOC) in August 2010. My role on the council is as an "Adult with a psychiatric disability". I represent the voice of the consumer. I oppose HB 6367, which calls for the elimination of the BHPOC. I would like to take this opportunity to tell you of my personal involvement.

I fully participate at every meeting. I strive to be thoughtful and productive and am now well versed in both the consumer and business side of mental health services. I also participate in the following subcommittees: Operations, Adult Quality and Access, and will be instrumental in forming the Consumer, Youth and Family Advisory group. I have been involved from the beginning of the Work Group for Health Homes since last summer. Last fall I was able to affect a change to the Level of Care Guidelines for Adults that made the language clearer for discharge guidelines. Why do I do all of this? I do it for those who can't and hope that my participation accurately reflects the voice of the consumer.

In establishing the BHPOC, Connecticut's lawmakers created a uniquely representative body to oversee the state's publically funded behavioral health programs for eligible children and adults.

Council members are appointed by Legislators, I am appointed by Speaker Sharkey. More than 30 members, representing consumers of behavioral health services, families and advocates, medical and mental health practitioners and state agencies actively engage and participate in the council.

How can Governor Malloy, the Human Services Committee and the legislature as whole make recommendations, propose bills and vote on a topic that they do not understand? How many of you know the difference between a SPMI, Cognitive, Intellectual or Developmental disability? Do you understand that no diagnosis is simple and each has a whole spectrum of behaviors? Did you know that it takes on average 10 years for a person to get a proper diagnosis? Did you know that 1 in 5 people have symptoms of mental illness; while 1 in 20 have a SPMI? Do you know what services DCF, DMHAS and DSS offer for behavioral health, and then only if the person qualifies for State services? Do you know that it can take years to find the right combination of medications to achieve stability? Do you know that recovery is possible and I am proof?

Last Friday, I delivered a proposal to the Governor, President Pro Tempore, and the Speaker, recommending "Mental Illness 101" education be MANDATORY for every legislator. I am offering to educate you; surely every legislator can spare an hour to become better informed on a topic that is the focus of so many proposed bills. I will present basic factual, statistical and researched backed information about mental illness; I have attached the proposal to my testimony. My agenda is simple, to educate those who will be making decisions that affect over 700k residents in the State of Connecticut. Unless Governor Malloy has discovered the "cure" for mental illness, we still have a lot of work to do, on the BHPOC, as a State and Nation. We are currently in the spotlight because of Sandy Hook; please don't waste this opportunity to show that you are willing to become educated about a topic before you vote. I hope that you will all support my efforts and proposal.

Dr. Ezra Griffith recently asked at a SHAC meeting, "Where does it stop?" he was referring to safety and security measures for schools. But his question also applies to HB 6367, currently mental illness cannot be cured, but recovery is possible. Calling for the elimination of the BHPOC because the Governor feels we are duplicative is not the place to start, "Where does it stop?" When the stigma is gone, when everyone has access to the services, medications and supports they need and the State of CT stops trying to balance the budget on the backs of its most vulnerable residents.

Mental Illness 101 Proposal

What: a one hour presentation giving basic statistically and researched backed information about mental illness.

Why: To provide education so that all State of Connecticut Legislator can make informed decisions and votes regarding any proposed bills related to Mental Illness

For Whom: all members of the House and Senate (mandatory)

Where/When: TBD (at the LOB, in groups no larger than 25)

By: Kelly Phenix

At the end of the presentation, attendees will know the difference between a severe persistent mental illness, episodic situations (i.e., depression after a life event) Cognitive, Intellectual and Developmental disabilities. I will speak briefly about different therapies (talk, group, IOP, PHP, Inpatient, CBT & DBT), medication and recovery.

Each person will leave with a comprehensive list of resources for their own further education. I will also be available for questions, and will research and report back, or will provide an expert referral if asked something I don't know.

I will not comment during presentations on proposed bills, any legislator who would like my input can contact me directly.

It is my intent to educate legislators so they will be better prepared to vote on proposed bills, speak with their constituents and help to reduce the stigma of mental illness. I believe "knowledge is power" and to defeat the stigma associated with a mental illness proper education about what it is and is not is a great place to start.

Please contact me at KellyPhenix@hotmail.com , or 860-202-6950, if you have any suggestions or research you feel should be included in my presentation